DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 064 911 EM 010 016

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TITLE	Media and Education: A Look At It Like It Is.
INSTITUTION	Federal Communications Commission, Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	7 Jun 68
NOTE	11p.; Speech presented to the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (Washington, D. C., June 7, 1968)
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	Disadvantaged Youth; Educational Improvement; *Instructional Television; *Mass Media; Relevance (Education); Speeches; *Television

ABSTRACT

All children today live in an aural and visual world--yet virtually every education program in the country is based on the print world of 50 years ago. Television must be used to provide motivation for children, particularly disadvantaged children, which print cannot--it must provide a socializing situation, make the real world a part of the classroom, provide the problems of the real world as a learning problem, and call the solutions and understanding gained education. White suburbia must also be educated so that free and equal opportunity will be realized. Teachers of all children should be freed from tasks which machines are capable of, and students should use the time they would have spent in rote, factual learning on developing their own potentials and creativity. (RH)

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Media and Education: A Look At It Like It Is

An address to the District of Columbia Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

June 7, 1968, at the National Education Association, Washington, D.C.

by Dr. Robert L. Hilliard

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Mrs. Walker, Dr. Manning, Mr. Fletcher, Dr. Wilhelms, Mr. Kornhauser, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

We bear with us today the emotional burden of a personal and national tragedy. Some of us have reservations about being here. I thought about this a good deal, as I know all of you have. Because what I am going to talk with you about today relates to some of the goals and needs that Senator Robert F. Kennedy dedicated his life to, because some of what I want to say to you directly concerns the events of the past few days and their meaning for us all, I am not only willing to be here, but grateful to you for the invitation that allows me to be here to talk with you about these things.

Thank you, Lou /Kornhauser/ for your very generous introduction.

I have an additional confession to make. I have a Ph.D--in education.

I have an even worse confession to make. I went to Teachers College, Columbia.

And what's worse--I liked it.

And the most terrible thing of all--I did post-doctoral work at T.C. in curriculum and administration.

Now all this should clearly disqualify me from addressing you here today as a government official. Because, on paper, at least, I should know what I'm talking about.

But don't be fooled by credentials. I'll disabuse you of that by saying right off that I believe John Dewey was right. That's enough to alienate at least half of any crowd, in education or out.

Recently I was reading a review of a new edition of John Dewey's "Lectures in the Philosophy of Education," originally written in 1899. The review stated that Dewey's philosophy of education "has only a limited relevance to the problems in our schools and colleges that perplex us most." The implication, as I understood it, was that Dewey's stress on the socialization of the child--that is, the education that could put the child into an effective relationship with and control over his environment--was not entirely desirable or successful, as related to the potentials and needs in education. Unfortunately, the reviewer seems to be further away from the realities of education today than Dewey was 70 years ago. What are the desirable goals of education today? Combining the instrumentalist, rationalist and eclecticist philosophies, education's goals are, briefly, fourfold: to educate the student to achieve effective participation as a citizen in the affairs of the world; to achieve self-realization; to acquire some degree of vocational efficiency; and to attain ethical and aesthetic growth.

Dewey could not do this, seventy years ago or even thirty years ago, except in a partial and limited way. Very simply, he could not take every student in every classroom into every corner of the outside world; and he obviously could not bring the world into the classroom. I don't have to tell you that we are doing precisely that today in every classroom where the modern media of communication are present and are being used.

Now that's a nice friendly academic way to begin, isn't it. Nice, polite academic talk. Nobody disturbed or made uncomfortable.

There's only one problem. We're not living in a nice, comfortable, friendly academic world. And that perhaps is the root of our educational problem today. Many of us pretend we are.

I wonder what would happen if we tried to look at it like it really is? Yes, I am aware of what can happen. There are a lot of people who don't like it when some people tell it like it is. And that's true for educators, too. So, you've been warned. If you want to turn me off, you'd better do it now.

Let's look first at the majority of children you deal with every day in the hard, cold realities of D.C. education.

The black child is put into the classroom surrounded by print materials that he cannot read, given tasks that he cannot do and that have little meaning to his real world. In most cities he is talked at by white faces in suits and ties that drive out of the ghetto in cars every afternoon to a different society. These are conditions of Kafkaesque terror for any child; they are unreal, they have no positive meaning, and it is incredible that anybody can be expected to learn anything under them.

It is no accident that in 1967 the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights reported that not a single compensatory educational program in the United States has been successful. It is no accident that New York

University's celebrated Clinic for Learning in a junior high school in Brooklyn's Bedford Stuyvesant area "got the hell kicked out of us" and abandoned its efforts. It is no accident that the millions upon millions of dollars being poured into special education for disadvantaged children by and large produce little or no positive results.

All children, today, including and maybe especially the ghetto child, live in an aural and visual world. Yet, virtually every education program in the country is rooted in the print world of fifty years ago. How can we expect any child to learn when we continue to use nineteenth century methods and techniques to try to solve the education problems that are rooted in the twentieth century revolutions of energy, transportation and--especially--communications?

The media change not only the content, but the entire behavior and learning and growth patterns of our children and even of adults. The child entering school who has watched TV--even non-selectively--is much better informed, all other things being equal, then the child who hasn't watched TV. (A child has watched some three to four thousand hours of TV by the time he has entered the first grade.) But information is the least important of it. More important is the child's special awareness of visual observation and learning, his abilities to relate non-immediate, mediated experiences to live experiences and to print description, his openness to the utilization of media for learning development as well as being able to sit--maybe rightfully impatiently and uncomfortably--at the other end of the educational log.

By the time today's child will have graduated from high school he will have spent about 15,000 hours in front of the television set and some 10,800 hours in the classroom. Television is a primary medium of communication reception for him. And as for radio--it sometimes seems that today's youth spend more time with transistor radios glued to their ears than doing anything else.

How many of you have heard the ghetto child say he doesn't find anything interesting in school? What he means is that he's bored because he can't read the book used as the core of instruction. We cannot teach him to read the book as we might teach children who have not suffered the psychologically destructive, deprived backgrounds of many of these children. We must first reach this child to motivate him toward the personal worth and confidence that will give him a base for being willing to learn. We must use those means to reach him to which he is already tuned in: radio and television. To continue to push print as the primary approach is to continue to create an ever concentric circle of stone walls surrounding the child.

Outside of school the ghetto child thinks, uses his mind. Inside the classroom he is being shut off from the world. Television and radio can bring that world in. We must use the mass media not only to provide motivation through visual and aural action--rather than through non-meaningful (to that child) print symbols--but we must use the mass media to provide a socializing situation for the child, to make the real world a part of the classroom, to provide the

problems of the real world as the learning problem; the solutions learned--or at least the understanding obtained--is what constitutes education.

Outside of the classroom the inner-city child, just to survive, must make meaningful, effective judgments and decisions every moment of the day--and night. This requires an intelligence of a high practical order that is not reflected in the verbal oriented-cultural achievement evaluations we call IQ tests. It is the kind of ability many industry people say they are looking for, but somehow have not yet really provided opportunities for.

The intelligence and potential are clearly there. They must be motivated and matured through communications and education. They must be communicated with and given an opportunity to communicate.

But it is not enough to educate the ghetto child so that he is able to make the contributions he is capable of. It is necessary to educate white suburbia to provide unconditional, open, free and equal opportunity for all contributions for the progress of our country, regardless of the source. It is necessary to educate all children, regardless of background, to meet the special demands of the society they are living in and will live in.

Consider the fact that knowledge doubles every six years: between second-grade
today and the time my/child is my age, 97% of the knowledge in the world will be new. We cannot meet the child's needs with horse and buggy educational techniques and philsophies.

As a parent with a child in the D.C. schools, I have been appalled at the resources being withheld from my child that are readily available--through WETA-TV, for example. Washington is the only one of the sixteen great cities in the country that does not make regular use of television in its schools. It is encouraging to note, however, that the D.C. Schools recently formally indicated its intention to develop an Instructional Television Fixed Service 4-channel system in the near future. (Dr. Manning has written letters on these plans to the FCC and to HEW.)

We must see the child in his present and future world; and we must also begin to see the teacher in the world like it is and not like it once was.

Let me say this: It is educationally blasphemous, economically corrupt and slanderous to human dignity and capability to permit a student to be taught such things as parts of speech, factual information, language memorization and/drill by a live teacher in a classroom--when that kind of teaching can be done at least as effectively by currently available educational media, enabling the instructor to be free to work with the students in their thinking, in their aesthetic development, in their moral growth. We should at least have enough respect for our teachers to grant that they can do things beyond that which machines can do, and we should cease using them as though they were machines. We should free our youth in the classroom from the excess time needed for factual learning so that they may devote that time to their fulfillment as non-mechanized human beings; not memorizing, but creating;

as people with minds that do not store information, but apply it; as living things with feelings and imaginations to take the mundane and make them beautiful and meaningful for themselves and for all the world.

If we had done this, perhaps we should not now be so inundated in an atmosphere of violence and intolerance that results in the murder of a John Kennedy and a Medgar Evers and a Martin Luther King and a Robert Kennedy. Have we no responsibility, as educators, for the attitudes that children grown into adults bring to society and toward their fellow man. As long as we continue to stress the competitive narrowness of information regurgitation at the expense of imaginative creativity, can we expect our youth to open their minds and souls to beauty and love and respect for life?

Marshall MacLuhan has put it this way, and we cannot ignore it: "All the young are in the same position . . . The discrepency between the riches of the TV feast and the poverty of the school experience is creating great ferment, friction and psychic violence . . . but the new era and the new violence does not have an end in view . . . it is the process itself that yields the new image. When children go to school they are filled with rage at the puny curriculum . . . the children in Watts were quite right in thinking 'Why should we go to school to interrupt our education?'"

The orientation of our schools today is too often misanthropic. The track system, the honors class, the Ivy League college preparation, the regents examination, the higher and higher grades--than the next fellow. Education today, out of the side of one mouth, keeps insisting

that there is some value in learning for its own sake, for an individual's personal growth and self-realization, for his own development as a thinking, creative human being. And with another mouth education sets up a system which tries to motivate the student toward automaton learning, memorizing more and more materials to spit back as machines, out of fear and pressure of not doing as well as the next fellow on whatever standardized mechanical storage and retrieval system of robot-like-teacher-fed and robot-like-student-swallowed-and-regurgitated information measurements we call examinations.

I assure you, computers can do better.

We stopped being horses when we invented the plow hitch. Are we going to continue to make our students into computers or are we going to provide for their use the computers and whatever other modern technology will free them for their fullest achievements as human beings with some true feeling and motivation for learning?

Have the curriculum and administrative techniques and learning procedures been reorganized and changed in your school system to meet modern needs and take advantage of modern potentials?

It is one of the strange ironies that automobile manufacturers and television engineers and toothpaste tube makers consider their products of greater importance to the continually changing society than do many educational administrators and curriculum experts. In virtually every industry you can name there is a new model division. A division that redesigns the productyearly, if necessary. In how many school systems is there a new model division, ready and willing to change curriculum,

administrative procedures and teaching techniques in terms of the changing environmental conditions and needs of the students--and each year, if necessary? As educators are we, each one individually, ready to begin to look at it like it is--and willing to tell it to ourselves and to our colleagues like it is?

Are our administrative procedures and organization and curricular developments designed to serve the real, current-day needs and orientation of the students, or are the students being fit into the mold of our own administrative ease and manageability?

How long before we begin to serve the students in terms of the learning and teaching potentials and techniques of the world we live in today and the world they will live in tomorrow!